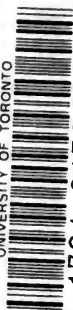


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Bramston, Thomas Gardiner  
The principle of the  
Corn laws vindicated

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*From the Author*

THE

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PRINCIPLE

OF THE

CORN LAWS

VINDICATED.

BY

THOMAS GARDINER BRAMSTON, Esq.

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LONDON :

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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To those who have examined, and attentively considered, the history and existing state of the Corn Laws, the facts and observations introduced in the following pages will be unnecessarily presented. But as the opportunity is not afforded to the public at large, nor perhaps the inclination generally entertained, to pursue so troublesome an inquiry; and as the notices of the subject taken at some of the public meetings lately held, and in some of the publications of the day, indicate a less persevering research, or a less candid exposition, and less accurate application of the results, than are due to the occasion, the Author has been induced to use his endeavours, however feeble, to extend the facility of possessing a knowledge of the *law* and the *fact*, and thereby to assist in obtaining from the Legislature and the British Public, a verdict, which shall best uphold the interests of the country.



# THE PRINCIPLE,

&c.

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IN all ages it has been the practice of wise Governments to direct their attention, in an eminent degree, to the means of securing a regular supply of the main article of subsistence for the people. The loudest, and most irresistible call of human nature is for food; and the considerations of prudence and policy, no less than those of benevolence and philanthropy, impose upon those who administer the affairs of a nation, the sacred duty of watching over this supply, and rendering it as abundant and as certain as causes, which human wisdom cannot controul, will permit it to be.

To this most important object the Sovereigns and Authorities of this country were in the earlier times accustomed to devote a great portion of their attention; and during the recent periods of our history, extending downwards to the present day, within which all the great con-

cerns of the nation have been successively and repeatedly the subjects of enlightened and free discussion in our Houses of Parliament, no one subject has more frequently exercised the talents of our Statesmen and Legislators, than that of the supply of corn and food for the people.

In a country of small extent, or which is tributary, or accustomed to ascribe its security to the protection of a neighbouring country, it may not be important whether the sustenance of its population be derived from its own resources, or from the more abundant productions of another country; but in a country claiming absolute independence of all others, and asserting its right of interference, and its power of interfering under favourable circumstances, with effect, in maintaining the peace of the world; in repelling national wrongs; in creating and continuing national benefits, whether the cause of interference be its own immediate concern, or that of another country, it may be safely affirmed, that this station of eminence, and of salutary influence, cannot be long preserved, if it be dependent upon other countries for the sustenance of its people.

The anxious care, therefore, and the paramount duty of those who govern a country of this class, must be, that the means of sustenance shall, in ordinary years at least, be derived from that soil which is their own.

By the wise and beneficent dispensations of Providence, the earth must be tilled before it is rendered productive; the persevering labour and industry of man must be employed to render its inherent fertility available to the supply of the wants of man; and experience of what human nature is, permits us not to doubt, that the disposition to perseverance in labour and industry needs encouragement to ensure to it its full effect; nay, to call it into existence.

Thus precept, and example, and authority, have been always used to stimulate attention to agriculture; and our statute books, from their earliest dates, exhibit continuing proofs of the purpose of those, who governed the state, to render the produce of the soil, if possible, adequate to the supply of the wants of the people; and as the means—the indispensable means of attaining this great end, to render the instrumentality of those, engaged in producing it, beneficial to themselves, in order that a safe assurance might be afforded of the possession of the benefits to be derived from it by their country.

One of the earliest instances in our statute books of this provident regard to the interests of the cultivators of the soil, is to be found in the statute 3 Edward IV. c. 2. passed in the year 1463; by which statute the importation of corn was prohibited, when the price was below a certain amount, “*on account of the grievous da-*

*“mage occasioned thereby to the farmers of the kingdom.”*

In this statute our ancestors then recognised the principle, that the importation of corn, under certain circumstances, might be injurious to the farmer, and that the interests of the state demanded his protection from injury.

But the declaration of this principle, thus made 364 years since, was not an insulated declaration, which has been unsupported by subsequent enactments, and unconfirmed by subsequent testimonies to its utility; for during the whole of the long period which has since elapsed, the intervals have been short, in which similar enactments have not been made, varying in terms indeed, but always in maintenance of, and analogous to, the principle of restraint upon the admission of foreign corn; though sometimes limiting the operation of that principle of restraint, in a degree which endangered and diminished the utility of its application.

By the 3d of Edward IV. in 1463, the prohibition to import ceased when wheat was at 6s. 8d. per quarter; a price which must indeed be deemed a price of small amount, even after every allowance has been made for the difference between the value of money at that time, and at the present; and we shall presently see, that whilst it sufficed to manifest the principle of imposing some restraint upon importation, it

failed to operate successfully as an encouragement to the grower of our domestic produce; and it is a reasonable presumption that it did so fail from the too small amount of the price at which the restraint upon importation ceased to operate.

For if we refer to the statute book, we find in 1487, (4 H. VII. c. 19.) 1515, (7 H. VIII. c. 1.) 1535, (27 H. VIII. c. 22.) 1552, (5 and 6 Ed. VI. c. 5.) 1555, (2 and 3 Ph. and M. c. 2.) 1562, (5 Eliz. c. 2.) 1597, (39 Eliz. c. 2.) such was the disinclination to agriculture, so feeble were the inducements to engage in the tillage of the land, that the express purport of those acts was by pains and penalties, by fines and forfeitures, to enforce tillage; to prevent farm-houses from falling into decay; to forbid the conversion of tillage land into pastures, and to direct that arable lands, which had recently been made pastures, should be again converted to tillage (*a.*)

In the year 1623, the act of Edward the

(*a.*) In Smith's tracts on the Corn Trade, (vide the edition published by Stockdale, in 1804, p. 196) a quotation is given from a writing published by Sir Thomas Culpepper, in 1621, in which he informs us, that "at that time the French with their corn, and the Dutch with that of Poland, supplied the English markets, and that the national corn was continually below its true value." "At present," says Culpepper, "whilst corn and the other merchandise which the earth produces, are at a low price, the spade and the plough are forsaken, the poor find little employment, and wages are extremely low."

Fourth, professing to restrain importation, but ineffectual to produce its ends, was repealed by the 21st Jac. I. c. 28. Agriculture, however, received at this time a more effectual stimulus, as experience proved, and which was directed to awaken industry and exertion, by encouraging the British farmer to become a competitor with the foreign farmer in the supply of the foreign markets. By this Act wheat was allowed to be exported till the price reached 32s.

In the succeeding reign, that is, in 1660, (12 C. II. c. 4,) 1663, (15 C. II. c. 7,) and 1670, (22 C. II. c. 13.) the attention of the Legislature was diligently and successfully applied to the furtherance of that great national object, the regular supply of food for the people, to be derived from the soil of the country; and the just and rational views which the Legislators entertained upon the subject matter of their discussions and legislation, is forcibly marked in the language used in the preambles to the statutes they then enacted.

In 1663, the preamble to the 15 C. II. c. 7, is expressed thus: "Forasmuch as the encouragement of tillage ought to be in an especial manner regarded and endeavoured, and the surest and effectualest means of promoting and advancing any trade, occupation, or mystery, is "to render it profitable to the users thereof." And the Act passed in 1670 (22 C. II. c. 13) is

entitled, "An Act for the further encouragement  
 " of tillage for the common good and welfare of  
 " this kingdom."

The wise and salutary principle of exciting an augmentation of home-production, by protecting the British farmer from the competition of the foreigner, in the home-market, till the actual price denoted scarcity, and by holding out to him a facility in disposing of his surplus produce in other countries in years of plenty; was fully established by these statutes. By the first of them, a duty of 40s. a quarter effectually prevented the importation of wheat, when the price of wheat was under 44s.; reducing the duty, however, to 6s. 8d., when the price exceeded 44s. By the second, the duty was further reduced to 5s. 4d.; but the importation was not permitted to take place at all till the price exceeded 48s.

By the third, and which was an Act which remained in force in this most important provision for upwards of a century, *viz.* from 1670 to 1773, a period during which the country was eminently blessed with cheapness and plenty, all importations of wheat were restrained by a duty of 16s. till the price reached 53s. 4d., and by a duty of 8s. when the price exceeded 53s. 4., and until it reached 80s.

Nor was the confidence thus raised in the farmer's breast by the measures of this period,

that he should securely enjoy the fruits of his own industry, and the returns of his own capital, derived solely from the exclusion of, or effectual restraint upon, *imported* corn; for the disposal of his *surplus* was regarded in the enactments for the regulation and encouragement of *exportation*.

In 1663, by the 15 C. II. c. 7, exportation was permitted till the price reached 48s.; and in 1688, by the 1st of W. and M., stat. 1. c. 12, whenever wheat was below 48s., its exportation was further encouraged by a bounty of 5s.

And of the various Acts passed about this period for the encouragement of tillage, "for the common good and welfare of this kingdom," that which was perhaps the most effectual, was the Act of the 1st of W. and M., by which a bounty was given on exportation. (b)

To those who have not carefully directed their attention to this subject, it may appear, that the exportation of corn has, in all cases, an obvious and irresistible tendency to enhance its price at home, and that the importation of it has an opposite tendency to reduce it.

But from prejudice and prepossession, from conjecture and from theory, let us appeal to the evidence of facts.

Whether the mere permission to export till

(b) See Smith's Corn Tracts, page 68.

the price reached 48s., granted by the 15 C. II. c. 7, produced any material result, or whether the more substantial encouragement to export, afforded by the bounty of 5s., enacted by the 1st of W. and M., stat. 1. c. 12, operated in any important degree within the first few years after it had passed, we have not any evidence from official documents to inform us, for the official accounts of exports do not reach higher than to 1697. But from 1697 to 1765, a period of 68 years, the effects of the permission to export, and of the encouragement to do so, and the connexion between exportation and advance of prices, are presented to our view by official documents of undisputed authority.

Upon reference to Smith's Corn Tracts, p. 152, it will be seen, that the quantity of wheat exported in these 68 years, was 14,332,435 quarters, and that the quantity imported was only 283,441 quarters: the excess exported being 14,048,994 quarters; the average annual exportation through the whole period being 210,771 quarters, and the average annual importation only 4,168 quarters. (c)

The supposition that exportation need not produce increase of price at home, will best ap-

(c) See the Table in Smith's Corn Tracts, p. 305 to 319. It therein appears, that of the whole quantity imported in the 68 years, and which was only 283,441 quarters, 141,562 quarters were imported in the year 1757, a year of scarcity.

pear, by a comparison of the prices obtained before exportation prevailed, for want of the encouragement given by the Parliamentary enactments in 1663 and 1688; and the prices obtained after these measures were in full operation.

The statement which follows, is taken from Smith's Corn Tracts, p. 132, 133, and exhibits the average prices in the 91 years antecedent to the establishment of the bounty of 5s., and the prices in the 79 years subsequent to that enactment.

|                                | £ | s. | d. |
|--------------------------------|---|----|----|
| " From 1595 to 1686, average . | 1 | 18 | 0  |
| " 1686 to 1726, average .      | 1 | 15 | 9  |
| " Less for the first 40 years  | 0 | 2  | 3  |
| " From 1595 to 1686, average . | 1 | 18 | 0  |
| " 1726 to 1765, average .      | 1 | 10 | 9  |
| " Less for the last 39 years   | 0 | 7  | 3  |
| " From 1595 to 1686, average . | 1 | 18 | 0  |
| " 1686 to 1765, average .      | 1 | 13 | 2  |
| " Less for the last 79 years   | 0 | 4  | 10 |

" And if we compare the average of the forty  
 " years immediately before that in which the  
 " bounty took place, with the average of the  
 " whole time since, the difference appears still  
 " greater.

|                              | £. | s. | d. |
|------------------------------|----|----|----|
| “ From 1646 to 1686, average | 2  | 0  | 11 |
| “ 1686 to 1765, average      | 1  | 13 | 2  |
| “ Less for the last 79 years | 0  | 7  | 9  |

But if a comparison of the prices during the long period of the prevalence of the system, which encouraged exportation, with the prices which were obtained antecedently to the effectual adoption of this system, compels us to infer from the evidence of facts, that the system of exportation of corn favours cheapness—the proper indication of plenty, it may be well to consider, whether subsequent occurrences contradict, or are at variance with, this inference; and whether an excess of importation has been found to produce the same beneficial result.

With this view it may be proper to have regard to the progress of events connected with the present subject, from the period, at which an account of the exports and imports of corn was first officially prepared and preserved—(viz. from the year 1697,) to the latest time to which such accounts can be referred to: viz. to the end of the year 1825: and in directing our attention to this extensive space of time, it may be convenient to subdivide it, and to consider it in the four following portions, and with reference to the following particulars.

| EXPORTED.    |        |            |                    | IMPORTED.  |                    | Av. prices<br>of whole<br>periods. |
|--------------|--------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Periods.     | Years. | Total.(d)  | Annual<br>Average. | Total.     | Annual<br>Average. |                                    |
| 1697 to 1764 | 68     | 14,392,532 | 211,654            | 295,647    | 4,347              | 36s. 11d.                          |
| 1765 to 1792 | 28     | 2,960,172  | 105,720            | 4,510,500  | 161,087            | 46 1½                              |
| 1793 to 1814 | 22     | 1,338,756  | 63,750             | 12,704,366 | 577,471            | 79 0¼                              |
| 1815 to 1825 | 11     | 1,337,125  | 121,557            | 4,771,935  | 433,812            | 66 8                               |

In the first period of 68 years, the annual average exported exceeds the annual average imported, as . . . 48 to 1

In the second period of 28 years, the annual average imported exceeds the annual average exported, as . . . 3 to 2

In the third period of 22 years, the annual average imported exceeds the annual average exported, as . . . 9 to 1

In the fourth period of 11 years, the annual average imported exceeds the annual average exported, as . . . 3½ to 1

But in the fourth period, if the two years 1817 and 1818 be excluded, the annual average imported exceeds the annual average exported, only as 3 to 2, the total excess of importation in the nine years amounting only to 817,949

(d) It will be seen that there is a small variation between the quantities here stated to have been exported and imported in the 68 years, and the quantities before stated. It is thus accounted for. In the former instance, the quantities were taken from Smith's Corn Tracts, p. 132, 133, and in the present instance, they are taken from the account printed in the Appendix to the Report of the Committee of the House of Commons in 1814.

quarters : being a net annual average of no more than 90,823 quarters, and which accession was evidently created not by the wants of the country, but by the speculations of capitalists ; and it would have remained under lock, and been excluded from home consumption, had it not been released by the 6 G. IV. c. 64, the 6 G. IV. c. 65, and the 7 G. IV. c. 70.

We have seen that the average prices in the 91 years antecedent to 1686, exceeded the average prices in the 79 years subsequent to 1686, when exportation received its great encouragement and began to prevail ; by 4s. 2*d.* per quarter. We shall now find, that the average prices in the 68 years, intervening between 1697 and 1764, comprehending the greater part of the period of exportation, and commencing with the year in which the accounts at the Custom House were first regularly kept, were less than the average prices of the second period of 28 years, from 1765 to 1792, when importation had begun to prevail, by no less than 9s. 2½*d.* per quarter ; the average price of the 68 years being only 36s. 11*d.*, whilst the average price of the ensuing 28 years was 46s. 1½*d.*(*e*)

(*e*) For an accurate and authenticated account of exports and imports from 1697 to 1812, see the printed Report of the Committee of the House of Commons in 1814, in the Appendix, p. 38.

For an account of the average prices from 1697 to 1799,

In the third period of 22 years, from 1793 to 1814, when importation was unlimited, and of enormous amount, the rapid increase of price became still more strikingly apparent; for the average price of the 22 years was 79*s.* 0 $\frac{3}{4}$ *d.*, being an excess of no less than 32*s.* 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.* above the price of the second, or next preceding period, and an excess of no less than 42*s.* 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ *d.* above the price of the first period.

It is true this third period was attended by circumstances, which established and marked its peculiarity, and which shall hereafter be specially adverted to.

In the fourth period of 11 years, commencing in 1815 and extending to 1825, the average price has been 66*s.* 8*d.*; but if the average price of the year 1826 be added, (which was 57*s.* 11*d.*,) the average price of the 12 years will be only 65*s.* 11*d.*; a price undoubtedly far exceeding the price of the first period, and even

see Smith's Corn Tracts, p. 305 to 319. It will be seen that the prices as there stated, were taken from the account kept in Eton College, of the prices obtained in Windsor market, one-ninth part being deducted for the difference between the nine gallon measure, and the Winchester bushel; and one other ninth for the difference between the qualities of the best and of middling wheat. From 1771, however, Mr. Smith introduces in a parallel column the prices given in Mr. Catherwood's tables, and as they refer to the prices throughout the kingdom, whilst those in Eton College refer to the prices in Windsor market alone, those in Mr. Catherwood's tables from 1771 have been preferred.

far exceeding the price of the second period, but yet a price which may appear in the course of this inquiry, not greatly to exceed that, which under the change of circumstances, produced by the vast expenses of the late long protracted war, is necessary to remunerate the British farmer; and which policy, as well as justice, may therefore recommend that the British nation shall consent to pay.(f)

It will not readily be supposed that these results ensued because importation was not carried far enough; for it may be seen, that in the year 1800—the importation of wheat was no less than 1,264,530 quarters—and in 1801, no less than 1,424,766 quarters; and in 1810, no less than 1,530,691 quarters; and in 1817, no less than 1,030,830 quarters; and in 1818, no less than 1,586,031 quarters. And thus the foundation seems securely laid, as far as experience can be used as a material in its construction, for the

(f). The annual averages of the last eight years have been as follows :—

|           | s. | d. |
|-----------|----|----|
| 1819..... | 72 | 3  |
| 1820..... | 65 | 10 |
| 1821..... | 54 | 5  |
| 1822..... | 43 | 3  |
| 1823..... | 51 | 9  |
| 1824..... | 62 | 0  |
| 1825..... | 66 | 6  |
| 1826..... | 57 | 11 |

The average of the eight years has been 59s. 3d.

inference, that importation cannot be hailed as the welcome parent of cheapness, and that with this great end in view, we must direct our attention to other causes.

But in the third of the periods, into which the entire period of 129 years has been subdivided, it is undoubtedly true, and it must in candour be conceded, that an extraneous cause was in operation, which influenced and controuled the markets, in a manner which baffled all antecedent calculation of value; and in several years rendered importation innocuous to the farmer; though by its want of limit it rendered him its victim in abundant seasons, whilst it did not impair his unreasonable profits in years of comparatively short supply.

It was said many years since by the writer of one of the Tracts published by Mr. Smith, that “our fleets and our armies have large mouths “that must be supplied; and that when the “public agents go into the market with additional demands, the prices must necessarily “arise.” But at that time no correct estimate could have been made, for no contemplation could have been entertained of the circumstances in which the country was placed during the last war.

Our fleets and armies never before made any approximation to that numerical magnitude; our colonies and foreign dependencies never were so

many and so important; and the efforts to render them absolutely dependant upon the mother country, for their supplies of sustenance, never were conceived in so bitter a spirit of hostility, and supported by such gigantic power to insure or promote their success.

The public agents therefore pervaded the country, and appearing in the markets with instructions to buy at *any* price, that price was often regulated and controuled by a cause quite distinct and alien from the consideration of the customary relation of demand and supply, as connected with the produce of the season, and the ordinary wants of food for the people.

The circumstances of this third period, were indeed extraordinary and peculiar, and although on that account they render it unfit to be adduced as evidence of the inefficacy of importation to reduce prices in ordinary years; yet they do not render it ineffectual to prove absolutely, and with certainty, that circumstances may arise, in which importation carried to the utmost extent, to which it is capable, will *not* avail to produce immediate cheapness.

But at all events, the inquiry after comparative cheapness may properly be directed to a comparison between the prices of the first period of 68 years, from 1697 to 1765, and the prices of the second period, from 1765 to 1792,

and we have seen the indisputable fact, that in the latter period, the price exceeded the price in the former by several shillings per quarter.

The questions therefore may now be properly asked, why exportation did not, in the first period, produce advance of price; and why importation did not, in the second period, produce depression: and to the answers to these questions, if they be correctly given, we may properly look for a guidance to our judgments in deciding upon the expediency of making an alteration in the principle of the existing Corn Laws.

A system of exportation of that article upon which the population of a country mainly subsists, must be admitted under ordinary circumstances to denote, and can hardly fail to co-exist with, plenty. Such a state presupposes a habit, and therefore implies a power of production and supply, in excess of, and above, the demands of domestic wants; and in this extent of production we have the surest, if not the only true, foundation of cheapness. In this long period of 68 years, the excess of the exports above the imports, affords us certain evidence that the soil actually yielded a produce more than adequate to the consumption.

The capability then being established, by what means was it excited and applied? the answer surely is obvious; the abundant production was

derived from the industry and capital of the farmer; and for the exertion of this industry and the application of this capital, we shall find the moving cause in the state of the Corn Laws.

If the reward of industry is not certain, the practice of it will be chilled, and it will wither; if the return of capital be not deemed secure, the use of it will be withheld or withdrawn. In all other occupations of life for profit, these maxims are allowed to be in force; and a moment's reflexion or observation must show, that they are equally operative in the pursuits of agriculture.

The subject of the Corn Laws is treated by some, as if luxuriant harvests rose spontaneously from the ground; and as if the condition of persevering labour had not been annexed to their acquisition. The earth, indeed, is rendered, by the bountiful dispensations of Providence, grateful for the labour bestowed upon it, but human nature requires excitement to bestow it, and the proper quality of that excitement is demonstrated by the historical fact that the laws made in the reigns of H. VII. and VIII. Ed. VI. and Eliz. to which reference has been already made, were found unable by compulsion to produce it, whilst the measures taken in the subsequent reigns of Charles the Second and William the Third, by which the *interest* of the farmer was made the encourage-

ment of his success, insured comfort to individuals, and plenty and cheapness to the nation.

The farmer will not direct his attention and skill to agriculture, any more than the manufacturer will apply his time and knowledge to the fabrication of articles of clothing, or of implements of convenience and utility, without a prospect of reward—and the greater the confidence is in the attainment of this reward, the more earnestly, and the more successfully too, will his exertions be applied.

Again, the subject of the Corn Laws is regarded by some as if the farmer's returns were all obtained by the diligent use of one cheap article only, human labour; but it is a *truism*, that no one can farm without *capital*. Whether a man will retain the possession of the property he embarks in the management of a farm, may be uncertain, but that he ought not to enter into the occupation without it, will admit of no doubt. The individual who is about to engage in farming, must possess an option, in common with his other fellow subjects, whether he will employ his capital in the manner he may have a purpose of employing it in, or not; the individual, who has already so employed his capital, must also hold an option, whether he will increase, or diminish, its amount; or withdraw it altogether. In the exercise of this option he will be naturally and

reasonably guided by consideration of his own interest, and the degree of benefit presented to his view, and the degree of confidence he entertains in the certainty of its enjoyment, will reasonably influence and controul his decision.

The result then is eminently dependant upon the farmer's confidence in the sufficiency, and the permanency, of the protection afforded to him by law in the use of his capital. That confidence was generated by the acts of Charles the Second, and of William; and plenty and cheapness were its offspring. The acts of the former reign assured to him the entire possession of the home market, by the restraints it imposed upon importation; and those of the latter reign encouraged him to look for a foreign market, in seasons of abundance, by exportation; and, impelled by this combined force, by these united stimulants, his hopes were animated, and his fears dispelled. The exportation was an exportation of superabundance, and the disposal of it animated the farmer to renew and extend his efforts to raise enough, and more than enough, for his country; by which, in ordinary years, the stream of plenty and cheapness might continue to flow; and, by which in seasons less favourable, or of absolute scarcity, an accession might be created, available to supply, in part at least, if not altogether, the deficiency so caused: and thus the Legislature

was from time to time enabled, in seasons of that nature, by temporary interruptions of exportation, to make provision for the wants of the population of England, out of those stores, which would in ordinary years have been destined to foreign use. For it is in the nature of a system of exportation to generate domestic plenty, and it is no less in the nature of a system of importation to curtail domestic supply.

But it is thought by some, that our population has been extended to that degree, that production cannot exceed the necessary supply—perhaps is unequal to it, and thus the question arises—*Can we now supply ourselves?*

That this country raised its own supplies during the 68 years, so often referred to, has, it is believed, been indisputably shown; and in despite of the discouragements to agriculture, which at the expiration of that period were begun to be adopted, the capability of the country plainly underwent no change; and in its enfeebled struggles its power was still apparent, and its success evinced; for in 15 of the 28 years, commencing with 1765, and ending with 1792, the exports exceeded the imports; nor were the years of prevailing export, consecutive years, in which case the effect might perhaps have been deemed attributable to special causes distinct from agricultural exertion, but they were

years distributed through the whole period, the first and the last being amongst them (g).

From 1792 till 1814, the imports invariably, and without exception, prevailed; and as the regularity of the change commenced with the war, and its uniformity was maintained during the whole of the long period of 22 years, for which the war was protracted, we may not unreasonably ascribe the circumstance of the change to the extraordinary increase of demand which the war occasioned; and not to any inadequacy of the powers of production to meet and supply the demands of the country, under ordinary circumstances.

The extraordinary demands created by the war have been before adverted to; and it has

| (g) Years in which Export<br>exceeded Import. | Years in which Import ex-<br>ceeded Export. |
|---|---|
| 1765  | 1767  |
| 1766  | 1768  |
| 1769  | 1772  |
| 1770  | 1773  |
| 1771  | 1774  |
| 1776  | 1775  |
| 1778  | 1777  |
| 1779  | 1781  |
| 1780  | 1783  |
| 1782  | 1784  |
| 1785  | 1788  |
| 1786  | 1790  |
| 1787  | 1791  |
| 1789  |   |
| 1792  |   |

The imports, however, in the whole period, exceeded the exports very considerably.

been already shown that they were not simply the demands produced by a state of warfare, in contradistinction to a state of peace, but by a war which, in its circumstances, was altogether unexampled.

The science of agriculture is indeed much more widely spread than it was at no distant time; but yet by those who have attended to the operations of agriculture, it is well understood that in many districts of the kingdom, if capital be not denied, and if encouragement be given to employ that capital, produce is capable of material enlargement.

In Ireland, however, great as has been the increase in the productions of her soil, in the last few years, there is no doubt that production is still in its infancy; that nurtured by the fostering hand of a wise Legislature, administering its support without jealousy and without distrust, and exhibiting in its guidance no caprice or vacillation; her resources would be found adequate to the abundant supply of all our wants, even under the circumstance of some deficiency of crop in this country (*h*).

(*h*) The following statement has lately appeared in the public prints, and although its authority is not known, there appears to be no reason to question its accuracy.

“ The importation of wheat from Ireland has been, on an average of the last 25 years, 187,438 quarters per annum;

It has been lately observed, at a meeting composed of men of eminent commercial intelligence and personal respectability, that Ireland would do better to withhold her grain for her own consumption, and in substitution for the inferior article of diet she has been accustomed to; but it seems forgotten that before she substitutes wheat for potatoes, the wealth of her population must be enlarged, and individuals must possess the means of purchasing that article which is the more costly.

The exportation of corn to this country, however, will essentially contribute to afford her those means, and with the means of home consumption the means of extending the sources and amount of production will be at the same time created.

But, in truth, the capability of the United Kingdom to raise its own consumption of wheat is not now a point of uncertainty, and a subject

“ and on an average of the last ten years, 303,286 quarters.

“ Of all sorts of grain, the average in 25 years has been

“ 265,968 quarters; and in 10 years, 1,341,855 quarters;

“ and in the year 1825, alone 2,203,962 quarters.”

In the six years, commencing with 1820, and ending with 1825, the importation of wheat alone has been, *according to official accounts*, 2,589,945 quarters, being annually 431,657 quarters; the greatest importation having taken place in 1821, when it amounted to 569,700 quarters: and the least in 1824, when it amounted to 356,408 quarters.

of argument; for it is notorious, that since February 1819, a period of eight years, no admission has been given to foreign grain into our ports for home consumption, with the exception of about 400,000 quarters admitted under the provisions of the Act of 6 G. IV. c. 65., of about 100,000 quarters admitted by 6 G. IV. c. 64., and of about 300,000 quarters admitted by 7 G. IV. c. 70.; and it has been already shown, that this enjoyment of domestic plenty has not been obtained at an expense which can justly be deemed so great as to impair the advantage of it.

It may now be fit to inquire, in what manner or degree the existing laws may be presumed to have administered to the state of the prices, which prevailed in the period of 28 years antecedent to 1793, (viz. from 1765 to 1792) in which an increase of price was manifested, and at the same time a great increase of importation, by comparison with the price and the importation in the period comprised in the 68 years preceding 1765; and also in what manner, and to what extent, the operation of existing law has been connected with, and may be supposed to have influenced, the prices which have prevailed since the termination of the war in 1815; from which time importation has ceased, with the exception of the end of the year 1816, and the

years 1817 and 1818, and the quantities admitted for home consumption under the recent acts just referred to.

The acts of Charles the Second, and William the Third, were, as we have seen, in operation until 1765, and their good effects have been distinctly shown. But the homely maxim of "leaving well alone" unfortunately did not prevail, for the confidence which had been so wisely created in the farmer was not upheld, and the measures of the Government and Legislature were well qualified, though doubtless it was not so intended, to impair it. A tampering, meddling, spirit seems to have interposed its baneful influence; and though the same principle was still avowed, temporary departures from it, seemingly uncalled for by any adequate cause, and repeated in various enactments in nine successive years, were well calculated to supersede all reliance upon the validity of that principle, and to enfeeble the efforts which had been awakened and supported by it.

In each succeeding year, from 1765 to 1773, acts were passed interfering with the laws of import and export; (*i*) and in 1773, by the 13 G. III. c. 43. instead of a prohibitory duty on imported wheat, of 16s. when the price was under

(*i*) See an enumeration of these acts in Smith's Corn Tracts. p. 320.

53s. 4d. and 8s. when the price was under 80s., the duty was reduced to 6d. when the price exceeded 48s. and thus an absolute free trade was established, counteracted only by this duty of 6d. whenever wheat attained the price of 48s. and as to the encouragement to export, the bounty of 5s. was indeed continued, but its range was limited within the price of 44s. instead of 48s., as before ; the excitement to provide for the disposal of superfluity of home produce being moreover suppressed, by the free admission of foreign wheat, at a price which would naturally check the farmer's disposition to venture his capital in the pursuit at all.

The preamble of the act of the 13 G. III. c. 43. is deserving of particular attention, for it seems to be congenial with the sentiments of some of the more moderate advocates, of a change in the Corn Laws at this time. It indeed recognises the fact, that “ the several acts of Parliament concerning the duties and bounties payable on the “ importation and exportation of corn, have “ greatly tended to the advancement of tillage ;” but it goes on to state “ that the regulating the “ importation and exportation of corn by a permanent law,” (*in the manner intended to be provided for by that act,*) “ would afford encouragement to the farmer, be the means of “ increasing the growth of that necessary com-

“ modity, and of affording a cheaper, and more  
 “ constant, supply to the poor.”

As to the intended incouragement to the farmer, and desired encrease in the growth of corn, the failure of the Act in effecting these objects, may be sufficiently shown by adverting to the circumstance, that in nine of the succeeding nineteen years importation exceeded exportation. And as to the object of affording a cheaper supply to the poor, it may be seen by reference to the table in Smith's Corn Tracts, that the annual average price of wheat in the nineteen years, from 1773 to 1792, of which nineteen years this Act was in force during eighteen, exceeded by 9*s.* 6*d.* per quarter the annual average of the nineteen years preceding 1765.

In 1791, the Legislature thought proper to retrograde a little, and to take a step, though indeed it was a very short one, towards a return to that system of protection to the British farmer by which the kingdom had so long been benefited. The bounty upon exportation, remained indeed precisely as it had been fixed in 1773, but an additional check to importation was thus far given by the Act 31 G. III. c. 30., that the free trade (counteracted only by the duty of 6*d.*) did not commence when the price reached 48*s.* as it did by the 13 G. III. c. 43. nor until it reached 54*s.* a duty of 2*s.* 6*d.* attaching to the imported wheat

when the price reached 50s. and a duty of 24s. 3d. intended no doubt to operate as an equivalent to absolute prohibition, when the price was below 50s.

By the tenor of this law, nay, by the terms of it, the expediency of giving further "encouragement to tillage," was acknowledged, but the encouragement was measured out with a most sparing hand; and it would probably have been found ineffectual to its purpose, had not the war, which immediately succeeded, introduced a period of no less duration than 22 years, in which demand was rendered so disproportionate to domestic supply, that after the year 1792, the bounty on export became an absolute nullity; and that in the remaining eleven years which intervened before the law underwent another change, in one year (*viz.* 1793), importation was subjected to the prohibitory duty of 24s. 3d.; in three years, (*viz.* in 1794, 1797, 1798,) it was subjected to only the trivial duty of 2s. 6d., and in the remaining seven years importation, (*j*)

| (j) Above 54s. | Below 54s. | Below 50s. |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1795           | 1794       | 1793       |
| 1796           | 1797       |            |
| 1799           | 1798       |            |
| 1800           |            |            |
| 1801           |            |            |
| 1802           |            |            |
| 1803           |            |            |

had no other legal check than the nominal duty of 6*d.*

In 1804, the operation of the bounty on export was extended to 48*s.*, and the import was restrained by the prohibitory duty of 24*s.* 3*d.* till the price reached 63*s.*; the trivial duty of 2*s.* 6*d.* operating between the prices of 63*s.* and 66*s.*, and the free trade commencing when the price exceeded 66*s.*, being then subjected only to the nominal duty of 6*d.*

Under the operation of this law during the 11 years it remained on the statute book, the importation was in one year (*viz.* in 1804), subjected to the high and prohibitory duty of 24*s.* 3*d.*; but it was in no year subjected to the trivial duty of 2*s.* 6*d.*, and therefore in the remaining ten years, the freedom of importation had no other legal check than the nominal duty of 6*d.* (*k*)

Thus in seventeen years out of the twenty-two, during which the war continued, importation was exempt from legal restraint, (for the duty of 6*d.* could not be so denominated,) in three years it was subjected to no higher duty than 2*s.* 6*d.*, and in two years only was it subjected to the prohibitory duty of 24*s.* 3*d.* But the increase of price was in the inverse ratio to the increase of duty; and the subjoined table

(*k*) It is to be observed, however, that the Act did not take effect till November 1804.



was unrestrained by law, importation wholly failed to produce cheapness; and the augmentation of foreign corn within our ports, and the increase of price to the consumer, were found to advance almost simultaneously, and co-extensively.

It is not however assumed, nor meant to be insinuated, that had the law afterwards passed in 1815 been then in force, the high prices of those seventeen years would have been prevented: they probably would not; for they were derived partly from bad seasons, but in a greater degree from the extraordinary demands, disproportionate to all ordinary supply. The high prices operated as a sufficient stimulus to the farmer, and were for the time an adequate substitute for the restrictive law of import in impelling him to exertion.

But if the causes of advance of price were at that time too powerful to be controuled by his exertion, so were they also too powerful, be it remembered, to be superseded by unlimited importation, and by free trade.

We come now to the period comprehended between the termination of the war, and the present day; the commencement of which stands distinguished by the act at present in force, the 55 G. III. c. 26; an act which has been spoken of in the popular dissertations of the day, whether committed to the press, or de-

livered, *vivâ voce*, at public meetings, as if it were the creature of a system adopted contemporaneously with its birth; and as if, from *it*, was to be obtained the first evidence of the prevalence of a principle in the legislation of this country, to protect the farmer by a restriction on importation.

That such a system did not, however, originate upon this occasion, we have sufficiently seen.

When the enormous prices of the war had carried the exertions of the farmer to the utmost height, and when under the continuance of those prices, the charges upon him had undergone a corresponding advance, not only as comprehended under the heads of rent, and tithes, and labour, but also in the article of taxation direct, as well as indirect; and when at the same time it was obvious, that the subtraction, or important diminution, of the demands of Government in the corn-market, could not fail to produce an important reduction of prices, the occasion imperatively called for the efficacious interference of the Legislature.

The class of farmers has, in common with every other class, a just right to the protection of that Government, which is constituted for the benefit of all classes; but upon the occasion in question, the consideration was not, whether individuals whose exertions had been directed to the public benefit, as well as to their own, should

be saved from ruin, but, whether a great national interest should be maintained or abandoned.

The adequate supply of sustenance to the people by the exercise of domestic industry, and the employment of domestic capital, had been always regarded as a legitimate object; and now that agricultural industry was at its stretch, and that the capital employed in agriculture had reached its greatest magnitude, the interests of the State forbade that the former should be paralyzed, and the latter destroyed. The population was indeed known to have increased in a very material degree, but the agricultural produce had kept pace with it, and the blessing of an adequacy of home-supply was still possessed, and would continue to be enjoyed, if that class from whom it sprung were not divested of their energy, and of their motives and powers of perseverance.

The principle then which operated in the councils of the nation in the reigns of Charles the Second, and William the Third,—a due attention to which had produced such salutary results (as has been shown) throughout the greater part of the last century, and which had never been professedly renounced by the Legislature, however feeble had been the support afforded it, was again resorted to; and by the Act of 55 G. III. c. 26, the general policy of sustaining the people, in ordinary years, by the

produce of our own soil, was again virtually declared; and the only means of giving effect to that policy was assured by the communication of confidence to the farmer which that act afforded.

The act of 1670, and the act of 1815, were the same in principle; their object was the same; and there is no rashness in saying, that their result will prove the same, if the latter be maintained as steadily as the former was. The duty of 16s., when the price was under 53s. 4d., was as effectually prohibitory of importation in 1670, as the negation to import at all for home consumption, when the price was under 80s., was in the year 1815; nor would the relative value of 53s. 4d. in 1670, be found materially, if at all, less than 80s. in 1815. Their common object was to create cheapness out of plenty, and to create plenty by exciting the application of the industry, skill, and capital of the farmer in its production. The result of the former was, that in a hundred and three years, during which it remained in force, the price to the consumer, taken by the annual average, reached 53s. 4d. in only ten of those years; and that of the latter has been, that in the twelve years, during which it has been in force,<sup>(m)</sup> the quarterly returns of

(m) The 55 Geo. III. c. 26. became in force, as soon as it was passed; and it was passed March 23, 1815.

the averages, have exceeded 80s. in only eight of those quarters, whilst they have been less than that amount in forty.

It has, however, been represented, that the high prices of 1817 and 1818, establish the inefficiency of the act of 1815, and of the principle on which it was founded, in maintaining prices of moderate amount, and in showing the security of a reliance upon home supply. But it is not in the power of man to avert the dispensations of Providence, and the seasons will not yield to human controul. From the great advance of prices at that period, the reasonable conclusion is, that the crop in 1816 in a great degree failed, and that that in 1817 was defective.

The annual consumption of wheat in Great Britain has been assumed to be 12,000,000 quarters.

Whatever the deficiency of produce in relation to this quantity was, the ports were opened for the admission of foreign wheat, to supply it, in November 1816, and continued open, with the exception of the last quarter in 1817, till February 1819. The consumers, therefore, had the full benefit of an unlimited foreign supply during that period; and the extent to which that foreign supply was carried, has already appeared. But importation did not present a remedy for the absolute scarcity produced by these unfavourable seasons.

vourable seasons, though it undoubtedly abated it, and had been properly resorted to in the defective state of our own crops.

Still the intimation is, that importation might have averted it, and that had the 55 Geo. III. not been passed, or had it permitted free importation, with a moderate duty uniformly in operation, the pressure upon the country would not have occurred, and the evil of an injurious price in the main article of sustenance would have been prevented.

But let us again advert to facts, and consider the support or contradiction they afford to this opinion. Twelve millions of quarters being the assumed annual consumption of the country, it may be reasonably presumed that at the time the 55 Geo. III. was passed, our domestic production was equal to this demand; for the quarterly averages remained below the importing price of 80s. during a year and a half afterwards. In November 1815, it may be seen that the quarterly average was as low as 57s. 2d., and in February 1816, when the law had been in force eleven months, it was only 53s. 9d. As the failure of the crop of 1816 became more evident, the price advanced, and in August 1816, it became 76s. 5d., and in November 92s. 9d.<sup>(n)</sup>

(n) See Parliamentary Papers ordered by the House of Commons, March 4, 1825.

The further advances of prices which ensued, in spite of the counteraction occasioned by unlimited importation, make it manifest that the proportional magnitude of the failure was great.

The effect of panic upon the minds of the consumers in a season of dearth, and the uncertainty which must always attend foreign supply, will undoubtedly augment price unnecessarily; but yet we can with no probability infer, that the accession by importation wholly made good the deficiency in the 12 millions caused by the failure of the crop in 1816. Economy, and the substitution of other diet amongst the more numerous classes, diminished, without doubt, the demand in no immaterial degree.

Let us now apply this to the state of things, which would have probably prevailed had the 55 G. III. not been passed. In that case, the stimulus to a perseverance in agricultural exertion to extend production which the enormous demands of the war had created, and which the Act of 55 G. III. had continued, would not have existed. The absolute ruin of many, and the distress of all, engaged in agricultural pursuits, must inevitably have previously taken place, and thus exertion having been rendered languid, and capital having been diminished, by the events of the preceding years, the supply of 1817, already shown to have been inadequate to demand, even with the accession of unlimited importations, would have been found to be deficient in a still

more important degree; the ordinary amount of our home-production having been reduced, not only by the adverse season, but also by the necessarily reduced exertions of the cultivators of our soil in obtaining it.

From the further aggravation of its distress, the country was saved by the law which, in 1815, had revived the drooping spirits of the farmer, and had reassured him of the protection of his country.

It appears to have been very properly a prominent object of Mr. Jacob's attention, in his last visit to the Continent, to ascertain, as far as practicable, the actual charges of cultivation in the countries he visited, and to determine the true amount of the remunerating price to the cultivator of lands in Prussia and Poland. But even in this country, where the ordinary items of charge are so familiar to us, the data upon which the calculation is to be made, are so variable, that it is most difficult, nay, impossible, to specify what shall be a remunerating price universally in any considerable portion of the kingdom.

It is, therefore, no matter of surprise, that in this inquiry in Prussia and Poland, Mr. Jacob has failed to arrive at any distinct or satisfactory conclusion.

Failing, then, in any general guidance, to be safely relied upon, which can be derived from Mr. Jacob's report in this most important particular, the reasonable course seems to be, to

raise a comparison between the remunerating price in England, and the prices in the countries above named, founded upon those facts which are distinctly within our own knowledge as applicable to this country, or are specially recorded by Mr. Jacob as in existence in the countries he visited; and thus we may perhaps be enabled to form a reasonable estimate of the difference in the remunerating prices in the respective countries.

Let us then advert only to the four principal items of charge, which the produce of the land in this country has to sustain, *viz.* labour, rent, tithes, and poor-rates.

If we take the price of labour in England at 20 pence per day, the total cost of labour upon 100 acres of arable land may probably in the year amount to . . . . . £120 0 0

If we take the rent at 20s. per acre,

the charge for rent will be . . . 100 0 0

The tithes may amount to . . . . . 25 0 0

The poor-rates to . . . . . 25 0 0

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£270 0 0

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It is evident that to reimburse this charge, it would be necessary to apply the price of no less than 90 quarters of wheat, if the value of each quarter of wheat be 60s.

But if we carry our imagination to a favoured spot, in which those charges should bear no higher amount, than it appears by Mr. Jacob's

report they bear in Poland, the estimate will be indeed essentially different.

In page 155 of this Report it is said, that the wages of labour are *near five-pence per day.*(o) The occupier of 100 acres of land would then have as much labour done for 30%, as in the other instance would be done for 120%.

In page 160 it is said, that, on an estate named, the rent amounted to 3s. 7½d. per acre.(p)

An individual would thus enjoy the occupation of as much land upon the payment of a rent of 18l. 4s. 7d., as in the other case he would hold upon the payment of 100l.

Tithes and poor-rates are unknown. Therefore the comparative accounts for labour, rent, tithes, and poor-rates, would stand thus :

|            | In the first case. |    |    | In the second case. |    |    |
|------------|--------------------|----|----|---------------------|----|----|
|            | £                  | s. | d. | £                   | s. | d. |
| Labour .   | 120                | 0  | 0  | 30                  | 0  | 0  |
| Rent .     | 100                | 0  | 0  | 18                  | 4  | 7  |
| Tithes .   | 25                 | 0  | 0  | 0                   | 0  | 0  |
| Poor-rates | 25                 | 0  | 0  | 0                   | 0  | 0  |
|            | <hr/> £270 0 0     |    |    | <hr/> £48 4 7       |    |    |

(o) These wages appear to be there liberal; for it is said, “the labouring families who engage themselves on an estate, obtain tenements, garden-ground, and, in some cases, fuel. They generally *pay rent* for them, which is deducted at the settlement at quarter-day, from the wages they have earned.”

(p) It is to be observed, that this rent was not fixed under circumstances of extraordinary depression; for it is said that “it was fixed at a much more favourable period.”

To reimburse these charges, however, in this second case, it is evident, that the same quantity of produce, *viz.* 90 quarters, would equally suffice, if the value of each quarter of wheat be only 10*s.* 9*d.*

It is intimated by Mr. Jacob, that a selling-price of 30*s.* is necessary to satisfy the Polish cultivator for the costs he incurs; (*q*) but the considerations which have been offered, justify the conclusion, that in this estimate Mr. Jacob has materially over-rated these costs; and it might be more properly inferred, that if a regular and certain vent for his produce could be assured to the Polish cultivator, the price of 20*s.* would compensate him for the charges incurred, and operate as a sufficient excitement to his industry. (*r*)

The charges for freight down the Vistula to Dantzic are no doubt not inconsiderable, and the charges for freight, primage, insurance, and shipping from Dantzic to London, are stated by Mr. Jacob at 8*s.* (*s*) per quarter; but it is to be remembered, that the charges for primage and insurance, and the shipping charges, attach also

(*q*) See Mr. Jacob's Report, p. 91.

(*r*) Mr. Volitski, a Polish gentleman in London, who has addressed to Mr. Jacob in the public journals some observations upon his Report, says, that in July last, the price of wheat in Poland was only 15*s.* per quarter.

(*s*) See Mr. Jacob's Report, p. 93.

to corn delivered in the port of London, from the out-ports of Great Britain, and that a charge for freight is in the latter case to be borne also; not indeed of equal, but by no means of insignificant amount. And as to the charge for freight from Dantzic, assumed by Mr. Jacob, a most important deduction is to be made, from the consideration, that the same policy which would dictate the free admission of Polish wheat, would suggest its reception in Prussian vessels; and it is stated in Mr. Jacob's Report, that "the Prussian shipowners have the crews at half the wages, and can maintain them at less than half the expense that English shipowners can do, independently of the smaller costs of the ships." (t)

Amongst the principal charges borne by the English farmer, one has been named, which seems to justify a short digression by a distinct reference to it,—the charge for *rent*.

In the intemperate language which has been used at some of the late meetings to consider the Corn Laws, a spirit has been manifested, and even by individuals of personal respectability and intelligence, conveying a denunciation, and leading their less-informed auditors to a proscription of, this charge altogether. In their reprobation of "the unreasonable avarice" of

(t) See Mr. Jacob's Report, p. 136.

the landowners, these individuals would perhaps hardly permit the Polish rent of 3*s.* 7½*d.* per acre to be paid in England without curtailment.

But yet the race of landowners in England have hitherto sustained a fair reputation, and the character of an English country gentleman has exhibited other qualities to invite notice besides his avarice. The income derived from land has not always been hidden in a cupboard, or dissipated in vice; but, perhaps, has not unfrequently been applied to the encouragement of British manufactures, and to the excitement of native industry and talent, as well as to the relief of native wants. There has indeed been a mutual interchange of benefits. The manufacturers, by their consumption of corn, have given a value to the produce of land; and the landowners, by the use of the manufactures of their country, by themselves, and by those to whom the circulation of their incomes extends, have given employment to the manufacturing population, and profit to those who have embarked their capitals in such establishments.

But landowners have, after all, no exemption from the ordinary qualities of human nature; they may not always see, any more than other capitalists and proprietors, the precise limits within which they ought to confine their attention to their own interests; and knowing that rent cannot always

be raised, when equity would permit it, they may, perhaps, not always be prone to lower it, when equity would demand it.

The fair and equitable consideration then appears to be, whether the ordinary amount of rent at this time bears a just relation to the circumstances of past and of present times.

In the year 1791, now thirty-six years since, and when the revolutionary war with France had not commenced, in the discussion upon the Corn Bill of that year, Mr. Powys, afterwards Lord Lilford, assumed the average rent of the kingdom to be 20*s.* per acre.<sup>(u)</sup> Perhaps he overrated it; but it is conceived, that in many of the counties of England, at this time, the average rent of the entire counties would not equal that amount; and in the large agricultural county in which the author of these pages resides, he has reason to believe that the average rent of the whole county would not be found to exceed that amount at this day.

The distress, of which the instances have been frequent in the class of landed proprietors since the termination of the war, has no doubt compelled them to make sales of their property, upon terms of unusual advantage to the purchasers; and perhaps four per cent. and even five per cent. may have been realized, under peculiar circumstances, upon the capitals so in-

(u) See Parliamentary History, vol. xxix. p. 100.

vested ; but in all ordinary cases, an accurate investigation would probably show that, after deductions have been allowed for land-tax, repairs, and other unavoidable charges, the rent, or net income, would generally not exceed three and a half per cent. upon the capital invested ; and very frequently not exceed three per cent.

The zealous advocate for a free trade in corn, when indulging himself in invectives against landowners, may not improperly pause and reflect, that in every contract for rent the consent of two parties must be obtained ; that of the party who engages to pay, as well as that of the party who agrees to accept ; and any extravagant calculations of the landlord will remain to be corrected by the cooler judgment of the tenant.

There are undoubtedly some leases still in force, which commenced in a period of very different prices from those obtained at present : it will be generally found, that the landlords have in those cases voluntarily submitted to abatements correspondent with the reduction in the prices of corn ; but where they have not so done, the time must shortly arrive at which the occupier, by the expiration of his lease, will recover the option of limiting the rent he shall hereafter pay by his own estimate of value.

As long as the expenses of production are paid, a small profit in addition will encourage the British farmer to continue his pursuit, and

the Prussian or Polish cultivator will no doubt yield to the same motive. It has, however, been shown, that the remunerating price to the former is most widely distant from that which would as reasonably compensate the latter; and it is at least as reasonable to suppose that Polish wheat can be delivered in London, with an adequate profit to the cultivator, at 35s. per quarter, as it is to suppose that British wheat can be delivered with any profit at all to the British farmer at 55s. the present price.

What then must have been the result if, in the year 1815, the Parliament had substituted for the law, which was then enacted, a law establishing a regular duty of 10s. or 12s. with free importation? The effect which such a measure would probably have had upon the situation of the country, under the failure of the harvest in 1816, has been already noticed. The effects of this failure, and of the deficiency in 1817, operated to maintain the price at an amount exceeding the importing price throughout the years 1817 (with the exception of one quarter) and 1818: but in February 1819, importation for home consumption ceased, and the ports have ever since remained closed.

The practicability of raising our own supplies of wheat has therefore been distinctly manifested by the uninterrupted experience of eight years, and with no circumstance whatever, at present

apparent, to justify the apprehension of its discontinuance.

Had free importation during these eight years been allowed, a duty of 10s. or 12s. obviously could not have availed to restrain it; and to the 12,000,000 of quarters, our computed annual consumption, an accession would have been made, of a magnitude which no one can duly estimate, for there is not a country in Europe which might not have contributed to it; nor would contributions have been wanting from America and from Asia.(x) Thus the vast surplusage of supply above demand must have depressed the price to an amount ruinous to British agriculturists, and in its extreme injurious even to the speculators themselves.

The evil, however, would ultimately have cured itself, for the wide spread extinction of property, and the desolation of classes, whose industry had been accustomed to produce comforts to themselves and opulence to the state, would have caused a diminution in the aggregate domestic produce of 12,000,000 of quarters; which importation might, in favourable seasons abroad, have supplied; but which, in the case of unfavourable seasons in the exporting countries, or of interrupted amity or intercourse with them, it would have failed to make good; and

(x) In 1820, upwards of 20,000 quarters were imported from ports in the Black Sea.

thus the government and the parliament would be compelled to see, that the best and only permanent security against national want is to be derived from the national agriculture.

The distress which pervaded the kingdom in 1822 was manifested in the loss of income, and consequent embarrassments of the owners of land; in the ruin or impoverishment of the occupiers of it; and in the unavoidable denial to a large portion of the agricultural labourers of the precious boon of labour and employment, the poverty of their employers not allowing them the means of continuing this mutual benefit.

The cause was no other than the sudden and violent depression of the price of corn in our markets below the remunerating price; for we find, that in November 1821 the average price of the antecedent quarter was 58s. 8d., and in November 1822, the average price of the then antecedent quarter was only 38s. 10d. a difference of scarcely less than 20s.

But to what was this violent depression imputable? Not to *importation* certainly, for nearly three years had elapsed since importation had ceased. It was then imputable to the excess of supply above demand, occasioned, in the first instance, by abundance of produce, but greatly aggravated by the necessities and panic of the farmers, which in innumerable instances compelled them, and in others induced them to

sell at any price, and thus to overload and glut the markets, and occasion stagnation in demand (*y*).

And this state of things having been thus recently experienced without the influence of importation, had three millions, or two millions, or even one million of foreign wheat been thrown upon our markets, and been superadded to the existing cause for depression, the vital energies of our own agriculture must have been still more completely paralyzed; and slow as has been the progress of their revival, a far more extended period would have been requisite to restore the agricultural body to any comparative degree of health and vigour.

If plenty, then, and cheapness be in reality primary objects in the estimation of those who conduct the affairs of the nation, the way to secure and perpetuate these blessings (under Providence) is to foster, and protect, and stimulate cultivation in our own islands; and by awakening and confirming confidence, to keep, if possible, the exertions of our cultivators on the stretch.

(*y*) It is obvious, that to satisfy an arrear of rent, or any other claim of 100*l*. 50 quarters of wheat must be brought to market and sold, if the price obtained be only 40*s*., though 40 quarters would equally suffice if the price be 50*s*., and scarcely more than 33 quarters if the price be 60*s*.

Our soil is capable of yielding us an abundant supply in all ordinary years; and if in years of failure or deficiency, an advance of price occurred, as reasonably it would, the approximation to sufficiency would have been extended by the habitual stretch of exertion; and foreign supply would be then advantageously resorted to, not to supersede, but in temporary aid of, domestic growth.

It is truly observed, in Mr. Smith's corn tracts, that "if there be a good crop, no art or scheme can enhance the price of grain; and if there be a bad one, no art or regulation of Government will keep the prices low (*z*)."

And in another part of the same work it is justly said, that "the attempt by any law to order it so that corn shall always remain at one fixed and certain price, would certainly fail (*a*)."

And to this it is added, that "to attempt such a regulation would greatly discourage tillage, as the farmer would be thereby assured, that should he have the misfortune to lose half his crop, he could receive no indemnification by selling the remainder at a higher price (*b*)."

Let not the consumer of bread-corn fear that the restriction upon the importation of foreign corn can confer a privilege upon those, who

(*z*) See p. 92.

(*a*) See p. 97.

(*b*) See p. 98.

grow it at home, of affixing any price upon it, which their cupidity may dictate; for in this respect they are subjected to a controul which operates with greater certainty and correctness than could be produced by the enactments of any specific law.

No system of combination could by possibility be contrived to unite the farmers in submission to any appointed scheme for the disposal of their produce. They are themselves dispersed over every part of the United Kingdom: the article they have to offer for sale extends to 12 millions of quarters of wheat; their motives of sale are various, and will as often be found to be in collision as in unison, but their necessities are common to almost all.

The grain which has been grown must, and will be brought to market; and the relation of supply and demand will, as far as the cultivators of the soil can interfere, solely regulate the price. If restriction on importation be maintained, the home production will in ordinary years continue to be found fully adequate to the wants of the nation, as it has been during the last eight years; nor will the price experience any other limit of abatement than may be imposed upon it by the operation of the failure of remuneration to the exertions used in raising produce, and the consequent contraction of the capital employed, and the inevitable deteriora-

tion of cultivation, and eventual diminution of supply (c).

But it is said a consideration still remains of such importance, that it cannot and ought not to be resisted. The *manufacturers* are aggrieved by the present system, and demand a change.

The manufacturers do, indeed, form an integral part of the community of great relative magnitude, contributing most essentially to the comforts of individuals, and to the national wealth and prosperity; and they are entitled to the fullest exercise of the care, and support, and protection of the Parliament and of their coun-

(c) The enemies to restriction upon importation are not, perhaps, generally aware that it is in operation upon the Continent of Europe, as well as in England. The protection of the grower of corn is secured by laws in France no less powerfully than it is in England, nor is the extent of protection materially dissimilar, nor the estimated cost of production.

Mr. Jacob says, that "some of the best judges of the subject have calculated, that wheat in the four classes of districts formed of the departments for the purposes of regulating the importation and exportation of corn in France, costs to the grower on an average from 6s. 4d. to 6s. 11d. the Winchester bushel;" that is, from 50s. 8d. to 55s. 4d. the quarter.

"The Corn Laws of France," he says, "are founded on a supposition of this being the price necessary to secure a profit to the farmer." "The average of wheat throughout the whole kingdom must rise to 6s. 8d. per bushel (53s. 4d. per quarter) before any foreign wheat can be introduced."—See Report, pp. 111, 112.

try. But their interests, and those of the agriculturists properly understood, are inseparably connected, and are bound up together by one common band of mutual benefit.

It has been lately stated, by an authority of the highest eminence, that the measure to be shortly submitted to Parliament has been conceived in a spirit "conciliatory towards all the "great interests involved in its consideration." May it, when it has been disclosed, be justly satisfactory to the nation! but if it has been framed to coincide with *separate* interests, and to effect a *compromise* between great classes presumed to be essentially *opposed*, the success anticipated can hardly await it; for it is not the interest of any particular class which ought to be regarded, but the interest of all classes; and it is not, perhaps, a principle of adjustment which is to be sought, so much as a principle of predominant and universal application. The government of the country ought to present themselves to the nation not as arbitrators between contending parties, but as oracles of original right, practical justice, and national policy.

The export of our manufactured goods is an object of fit attention and solicitude with the government, as one of primary importance to the state; but to connect this object with causes little affecting it, may too probably lead to disappointment, and terminate in aggravated loss.

It is then proper to inquire in what degree the export of our manufactured goods would probably be promoted, by a reduction in the price of wheat, *if that reduction could be permanently obtained by importation*, and in what degree the manufacturing population would probably be thereby benefited.

The descriptions lately given, and by the highest and most competent authorities, of the prevalent distress for some time past, and now experienced in some of the manufacturing districts, cannot fail to arrest attention, and they justly claim a tribute of condolence and compassion. According to the representations made at many of the public meetings lately held to petition for the abolition or revisal of the Corn Laws, this lamentable state of distress is imputable to the existence of these laws, and would be removed by their repeal. It is then incumbent upon those who advocate the principle of those laws, to examine the truth of this allegation, and to estimate the degree of relief which the measure proposed by the petitioners would be likely to afford.

It has been represented that the manufacturing labourers are now compelled to perform their labour for the wages of 6s. or 5s. or even 4s. 6d. per week; a rate of pay to which the agricultural labourers were compelled to submit, in a considerable portion of the kingdom in 1822,

and which it is to be feared is by no means unknown to them in some parts of it at this day ; but which, it must be admitted, is at the present ordinary charge for rent, and the costs of shoes, woollen clothing, and almost all the other necessities of life, except bread-corn, an inadequate remuneration for the labour performed, whether it be by manufacturing or by agricultural labourers.

But it has been declared to these sufferers, that the Corn Laws are the cause which has inflicted this evil upon them, and that their repeal will remove it.

What reduction in the price of the quarter of wheat the repeal would effect, has not been specified, but the most inflated imagination probably cannot contemplate a greater amount than 20s.

Now as a quarter is the usually computed consumption in the year by one man, it will appear that a reduction of 20s. in the cost would operate as a reduction of expenditure, or an increase of wages, of about three farthings per diem, or  $4\frac{1}{2}d.$  per week, a sum obviously insufficient by itself to abate, in any material degree, the pressure upon the labouring manufacturers, for whose benefit the change has been stated to be so important.

But it may be said the reduction of the price of bread-corn would reduce all other prices. It might be hoped that it would so operate in some

degree; but in 1790, the price of wheat was 53s. 2d., and in the last three months the average has not amounted to 56s., an excess of about 1-19th. Does, however, the charge upon the poor man for rent; did the costs of his shoes, his coat, his bacon, his cheese, his fuel, in 1826, bear the same proportion to the costs of the same articles in 1790? Certainly not. But to go one step further: could the manufacturing labourer securely reckon this vast boon of 4½d. per week as his own?

Be it remembered, that although the object in the projected repeal of the Corn Laws has been sometimes represented to be one of pure philanthropy, as dictated by the benevolent purpose of rescuing the manufacturing labourers from starvation, yet at other times (nay, even upon the same occasions) it has been described as an object not solely of individual, but of *national* importance; for that the *master manufacturer* would be thereby enabled to conduct his competition with foreign manufacturers with greater success; and indeed, that to this end the reduction in the price of bread-corn was necessary to *him*.

This nation, it is said, is essentially commercial; and the manufacturer himself, the labourer's master, stands in need, as we are told, of this 4½d. to enable him to compete in the sale of his goods with the manufacturers in other coun-

tries ; and therefore, whether it enhances the profit of the master, or is merged in the advantage enjoyed by the foreign consumer in the reduced price of the articles, it equally ceases to be an augmentation of the means of subsistence possessed by the labourer.

The plea of *cheapness* is indeed a dress, in which the change of the Corn Laws is not unnaturally attired by the advocates of free trade. For, if this plea could be maintained, and if, as has been professed, a redundant population could be thereby saved from starvation, and restored to comfort, the plea would be irresistible. But it is hoped that it has been shown, that just reasoning will conduct us to a different conclusion, and that this conclusion will stand confirmed by the best of all evidence, the evidence of facts, presented to our observation by the history of our own country.

The author has lately met with a printed letter, in reading which he has been gratified by finding that the opinions he entertains, had, in 1814, the powerful support of the present President of the Board of Trade, Mr. Huskisson.

The right honourable gentleman there appears as the strenuous advocate of the Corn Law of 1815 ; and he therein truly states, that

The consumers in general, and especially that class of consumers whose subsistence depends on their own industry, will be benefited by

maintaining the system which that law was calculated to maintain.

That it would be a culpable imprudence to place the subsistence of our own population at the mercy of foreign powers ; and that the most effectual security, both in peace and war, against the returns of scarcity, must be derived from our maintaining ourselves habitually independent of foreign supply.

That the history of the country informs us, that a steady home-supply is the only safe foundation of steady and moderate prices.

That if unlimited foreign import were now again allowed, bread might be a little, though a very little, cheaper than now it is, for a year or two ; but that the immediate consequence would be, that the small farmers would be ruined ; that improvements would every where stand still ; that inferior lands now producing corn, would be given up, and return to a state of waste.

These are not the effusions of an ardent imagination, and the conceit of theory ; they are evidently the dictates of a sober judgment, and are derived from principles which belong not to one period of time more than to another, but have their origin in the unchangeable qualities and motives of human actions.(d)

(d) The letter to which reference has been made, having been apparently published without the authority of its pre-

There is still one important circumstance to be mentioned, in addition to all which has been said in exposure of the fallacy of the expectation that cheapness is to be derived from habitual importation. As we became dependent for our supplies upon foreign states, the prices might be increased not merely by the cupidity of the foreign merchants and speculators, but by the exactions of foreign governments.

Experience may be resorted to as a safe guide in this particular; and for the confirmation of this opinion, we have only to refer to the fact stated in the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1821, and which is there given in these words :

“ This tax (the direct tax which may be laid  
 “ upon the export from countries to which we  
 “ resort for our supplies) in the Prussian do-  
 “ minions, was about 10s. a quarter during the  
 “ extreme scarcity which prevailed in this country  
 “ in 1800 and 1801 ; and it was expressly de-  
 “ clared, that the continuance or removal of this  
 “ tax would altogether depend upon the con-

sumed author, it might have been more proper to abstain from connecting his name with it at all, though it is annexed to it in the publication, if the sentiments declared in Parliament at the same period by the Right Honourable Gentleman, as recorded in the Parliamenatry Debates, had not been in strict unison with the sentiments expressed in the letter,

“tinuance or cessation of the wants of this  
“kingdom.”(e)

The plea of cheapness, then, or at least of permanent cheapness, is utterly unavailing to the advocates of free trade in corn; and although the popular mind, which is not regulated by consideration, or guided by examination, may adopt this delusive representation, the more consistent and intelligent supporters of the system secretly, if not openly, reject it; and in the abolition of the Corn Laws seek an object altogether distinct from it, and different in its nature. That object is simply this, *by the substitution of a given quantity, (say three millions of quarters) of foreign wheat for home-consumption, in lieu of the same quantity of our own growth, to create a market for our manufactured goods to the same extent of value.*

The annual consumption of wheat in this kingdom has been assumed to be twelve millions of quarters; and it has been indisputably proved, that our growth has during the last eight years been equal to our consumption.

Have those who entertain this object, calmly considered the effects of the accession of a surplusage of three millions of quarters of foreign wheat to the twelve millions already produced

(e) See Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, New Series, Vol. 5, p. 83, under the head *Reports*.

at home? The price of the twelve millions must conform to the price of the three, for as long as the merchant should be satisfied with an ordinary per-centage, and the foreign Government should superadd no duty or tax, the remunerating price to the foreign grower must control and supersede the remunerating price to the British farmer. Cheapness would indeed, for a time, be obtained; but when rents were reduced from 20s. to 10s., and poor-rates increased, under ordinary circumstances, from 5s. to 10s., for the necessary maintenance of the unemployed agricultural poor, the cheapness which would prevail would more resemble the coldness of death, than the vital warmth of health and vigour.

Perhaps the principle upon which free trade in general has been advocated, does not, when examined, disclose that genuine liberality of sentiment to which it lays claim. For though we indeed profess our general admiration of free trade for its own loveliness, yet this admiration may, when analyzed, resolve itself into a studied calculation and disguised adherence to our own interests.

In those who conduct our national councils, this is a wise proceeding. Their duty is best performed by advancing the substantial comforts and prosperity of the various classes of the community; and the impoverishment and distress of the people will be but ill compensated by a strict

adherence to philosophical maxims and sentimental conceptions.

It is true that we say to foreign nations, "Receive our manufactured goods at the price at which we can afford them to you, and compare them with your own, and let the preference be given to the best;" but we do not add, Send yours to us, and we will receive them upon the same terms; for, relying upon the advantages we have hitherto possessed, and still do possess, in our superior capital, skill, and machinery, we in fact presume that we can produce the same article of equal quality at a cheaper rate, and that, therefore, our superior cheapness will decide the option in our favour.

It is not, therefore, a *competition* to which we invite, but a *superiority* to which we ask submission.

Nor does the professed reciprocity appear to be more than a shadow; for whilst we invite the introduction of foreign manufactured goods, we properly restrict that introduction by a duty, which we suppose will raise the cost price of the foreign article to the consumer in this kingdom, to its cost price from the hands of the British manufacturer.

Thus it is said that a duty of 30 per cent. *ad valorem* will enable the British silk-manufacturer to compete with the foreign silk-manufacturer; and it is said, that with this imposition of tax upon

the latter, the former can meet him in the British market; without it, it does not seem to be pretended that he can; and with it, the success of the experiment remains to be ascertained. If the experiment fails, the duty of 30 per cent. will no doubt be augmented, and the thousands employed in England in weaving silk will be thereby, when at the edge of the precipice of starvation, rescued from it. If the experiment succeeds, the consignments of foreign silks will remain on hand, and a loss will be incurred, injurious to some individuals, but in no degree affecting the general prosperity of the country.

But for reasons already adduced, the British farmer cannot compete with the foreign farmer; and it is difficult to say what amount of duty would suffice to raise the necessary cost price of foreign wheat to the consumer in this country, in years of abundant produce abroad, to the cost price of our own produce.

If to the supply of twelve millions, a supply deemed adequate to all our demands, an accession be made of three millions, the vast surplusage must force a price bearing no reference to value, in its legitimate connexion with costs of production, and determined only by the irresistible necessities of the British farmer.

The legislature could indeed pursue the same course which they doubtless will pursue in the case of the silk-manufacturers, if the occasion

shall require it; they could augment the duty on foreign corn, till that amount operated as a prohibition of its import: but in the mean time the evil would not have merely affected a few speculating individuals, but a devastating ruin would have pervaded every corner of the kingdom. For, whatever may be thought by some, the property of farmers, with particular exceptions, is nearly or quite limited to the stock upon their farms; and a violent depression of the value of that stock could not fail to be accompanied by absolute ruin to a great proportion of its possessors.

But it is said, let a portion of this home-produce of twelve millions be withdrawn, let three millions be taken away, and give place to three millions of foreign produce. The markets will not then be glutted, for the quantity will be then no greater than when importation did not take place at all. Let the tillage of the inferior lands be discontinued, and this purpose will at once be gained.

It is not improbable that the reduced price of grain, and the advanced price of meat, (comparatively with the price before the war,) may dispose some individual occupiers of land, of which the soil is favourable to the change, to convert arable land into pasture; but any extensive change of this nature can be produced only in a length of time, and must be slowly progres-

sive. It would however be found, that a large portion of these inferior lands, though with longer intervals of rest, and with high cultivation, they produce as good corn as the superior lands, would yet if converted into pastures be almost valueless.

And this further obstacle to the change presents itself, that the operations upon lands in tillage, and more especially upon lands of an inferior quality, give employment to a number of labourers, probably exceeding as five to one, the number which would be employed upon the same lands in a state of pasturage, and thus the maintenance of four-fifths of the labouring population deprived of employment, would remain to be charged upon the poor-rate at the expense of the occupiers. (*f*)

But if the measures for effecting this great change are to be really adopted; if, because we are a commercial and a manufacturing nation,

(*f*) It has been stated in a pamphlet, which has obtained considerable circulation, that a benefit would be conferred upon the nation, by the *release* of that portion of the agricultural labourers from their occupations, who are now employed upon inferior lands, for that then their labour would be available in some other way, which would produce wealth to the state.

That other way, however, has not been named; and when agriculture is overstocked, and manufactures have such a redundancy as calls for emigration, as the only practicable mitigation of the evil derived from that redundancy, it must be difficult to demonstrate the existence of any such way at all.

the experiment is really to be made, whether the export of the manufactured goods of the value of three millions of quarters of wheat, by the substitution of that quantity of foreign wheat for the same quantity of our home-production, will be found a real blessing to the country; it will at all events be proper to consider what security we have for the acquisition of this benefit, and for the permanent enjoyment of this blessing.

There seems to be no reasonable ground of doubt, that if we ensure a permanent market for foreign corn, other countries will supply it, whatever the extent of our demand may be; for we *have* imported nearly 1,600,000 quarters in a year, drawn from a limited portion of Europe alone; and if other countries in Europe, which sent no part of this supply, were invited to contribute their quotas also for the future, and our markets were alike thrown open to the produce of America and of all the world, (as the system of free trade would prescribe that they should be,) interest would afford a stimulus to foreign agriculture which would render it capable of producing within a short period, if not immediately, stores of grain for our use almost inexhaustible. But the manufacturer does not, it must be conceded in justice to him, want foreign corn, unless it shall be paid for in British goods. He has a customer at home of no mean importance to him, and he cannot be disposed

unnecessarily to reduce, or to endanger the reduction of, his means of purchase. Our further inquiries must therefore be, whether the advantage of this exchange is likely to be realized, and in what degree.

When the advantages of an exchange of the manufactured goods of this country for foreign corn are presented to view, the conception appears to be immediately entertained by each class of manufacturers, that these advantages would exclusively become their own; but in the terms of the proposition there is no reason to suppose, that under the most favourable circumstances, the value of the exported goods would exceed the value or cost price of the imported corn. Now if the cost of three millions of quarters of wheat, in the country in which it is grown, be computed at even 30s. per quarter, the gross value will be  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions; but, great as this amount may at first appear to be, if viewed in relation to the aggregate amount of the value of all our exports, it will appear of secondary importance, and comparatively insignificant.

Again, if this amount of value of exported manufactured goods be confined to one species of manufacture only, the accession of orders to that class of manufacturers would indeed be highly beneficial; but in that case no benefit whatever would be derived to the other classes of manufacturers, and the measure would not

affect *their* interests at all: and if the exported manufactured goods be taken from *every* species of manufacture, the distribution and subdivision of the benefit would greatly impair its value to either.

In the debates which occurred in the year 1815, when the Corn Law, at present in operation, was under discussion, it was asked why the experiment should not be tried of putting other countries in the same condition with respect to ourselves, that Ireland was in. The distinguished individual, who now presides over the Board of Trade, replied to this question, “that he would tell the honourable gentleman “(who asked it) why that experiment would “not do. Ireland was under our controul, and “other countries were not: besides, did not “Ireland receive our manufactures in return, “and were we quite sure that other countries “would do so?” (g)

The impression of doubt or distrust which operated upon the powerful intellect of this gentleman at that time, was reasonable and just; but if that opinion was entitled to consideration at a time when the Continent of Europe was just emerging from the desolations of a most protracted and devastating war, with how much greater reason may it now be entertained, when manufacturing establishments have been created

(g) See Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, vol. 29. p. 1039.

in every part of the Continent, generally instituted and conducted by native talent and industry, but in very many instances commenced and maintained under the auspices of British skill and enterprise, aided by British experience, and supported by British capital.

France, Germany, and Russia would gladly send us corn, if our markets were permanently open for its reception; but would they take our cottons, our woollens, or our linens in exchange for it? Great as is the population of the kingdom of the Netherlands, the extraordinary fertility of the soil would perhaps enable that kingdom also to afford us a portion of its produce, and which, in that case, they would gladly send us; but would they, in exchange for it, receive our manufactured goods?

To the kingdom of Prussia then could we alone look in Europe for that exercise of liberality, and for that cordial co-operation in furtherance of the splendid theory of free trade, under the influence of which it is presumed that a free interchange of commodities ought to take place between different countries, each country contenting itself with the production of those articles which it has a natural facility of supplying, and reciprocally exchanging the same with each other: England under these impressions consenting to receive a large portion of her sustenance from Prussia,

and Prussia consenting in return to clothe her population with the manufactures of England.(h)

But plausible as the theory may appear by some its practical application may still be questioned. At a season of the greatest difficulty in providing sustenance for the people of England, the government of Prussia imposed, as we have seen, a duty of 10s. per quarter upon wheat, because our *necessities* would compel us to import it, and the fear of starvation would oblige us to submit to it.

In a season of dearth, then, when our own produce having been in ordinary years reduced from 12 to 9 millions, if it was by a visitation of Providence reduced to 7, or to 6, the exorbitant duty would no doubt be revived, perhaps at an increased amount, *because our necessities would compel us to submit to it.*

Our necessities would not, however, be limited to the *importation* of corn ; they would extend, also, to the *exportation* of manufactured goods

(h) At the meeting of the gentlemen, &c. resident in the hundred of Blackburn, held on the 24th of November last, the first Resolution was expressed in these words :

“That it is highly expedient to encourage a free interchange of commodities between different countries, by which means the people of *each* nation may be induced to apply themselves to the production of such commodities as they have a natural facility of supplying, reciprocally exchanging the same with each other.”

in exchange for it. But the same authority which could and would, as far as experience can instruct us, impose a grievous duty upon the corn exported from Prussia, would, as we might reasonably expect, impose an equally grievous duty upon the manufactured goods imported into Prussia; the same sentiment and motive on the part of Prussia being applicable to both cases, and the same necessity, on the part of England, compelling submission to it in both.

It has been admitted and declared at meetings held in the manufacturing districts, for the purpose of petitioning for the abolition of the Corn Laws, that *Foreign States are rivalling us in every department of our manufactures*. Prussia may not be so much advanced in these establishments as other foreign Continental States, but she is not without them. And if it has not hitherto been the policy of her government to afford them the same encouragement and protection which they have received in other states, a system so obviously beneficial to the subjects of that state cannot long continue neglected, or long fail to be adopted for the advancement of their interests.

The immense increase in their produce of wool has found a market in this country, till it has exceeded demand. The demand in this country failing, the woollen manufacturers in Prussia and Poland will of course be placed in a state of

increased activity (*l*), and their success in competing with us in price, if not in quality, will be rendered highly probable (*m*).

In another article the Prussian states are said to be already our rivals in manufacture, and with increasing prospects of success. The linens wrought in one of their provinces have long held a high celebrity; and it has been said their growth of *flax* has of late been much increased, and that they now export an increased quantity of linen, of inferior quality, perhaps, but recommended by its superior cheapness. Let us not deceive ourselves; the subjects of the Continental States are not destitute of manufacturing skill; but if they want more, there are British subjects ready to impart it to them. We possess no monopoly of machinery; and if, on the Continent, they have not yet in some articles attained our excellence, and availed themselves of all our scientific improvements, those who are

(*l*) M. Volitzki observes, “that if manufactures continue to increase as they now do, the cultivator in Poland will find a large demand for his crops in his own country.”

And he states, that “the manufacturer of fine woollen cloth has extended rapidly in Poland, in consequence of the great demand in Russia and China.” See Letter from M. Volitzki, published in the Courier, 11th December last.

(*m*) It may be said that in Prussia the woollen manufactories must remain upon a very limited scale for want of capital in the country; but every day’s experience shows that there are capitalists in England ready to transfer their capital wherever it will return the greatest profit.

conversant with those improvements may, and do, convey the requisite instruction for the formation of these articles; and our artizans being allowed by law to emigrate, will be found upon the spot in readiness to execute the orders for them (*n*).

Skill, machinery, and capital being then in a certain degree possessed, and available to a far greater extent, even in those parts of the Continent from which our manufactures are not already excluded, the competition can be hardly expected even there to avail us long, and an act of despotic power may terminate it at any time.

It would be unbecoming to throw away and renounce any benefit to our trade, because our trade is essentially contributory to our national prosperity; but it is to be hoped that profound deliberation will be exercised before the Legislature shall be induced to consent to sacrifice a certain and substantial good, for the sake of so precarious an acquisition of benefit as might be derived from the exportation of a portion of our manufactured goods in exchange for foreign corn.

An endeavour has been industriously used, and by persons of consideration, to excite a pre-

(*n*) The fact is sufficiently notorious; but it was said lately in the House of Commons, as reported in the newspapers, that in a recent instance ten of our ablest mechanics had left Manchester under an engagement in foreign employment.

judice against the Corn Laws by a representation that to those Corn Laws it is attributable that manufactories have been established upon the Continent, and that the conductors of them are in those flourishing circumstances in which they appear to be.

Our non-importation of corn, for the last few years, is said to have divested other countries of the power of purchasing our manufactures, by the denial of admission into our ports of the only article they had to offer us in exchange; and further, to have excited a retaliatory spirit, by which they have been led to manufacture for themselves what it would undoubtedly have been our interest to manufacture for them.

But there is surely fallacy in this representation; for as a natural and just policy will always dispose a wise government in every country to encourage and protect those establishments, by which all the wants of the nation may, if possible, be supplied at home, so the most certain means of effecting this object is to be derived from the augmentation and influx of wealth. And in this view, as the millions of gold transmitted from this country to the Continent during the war, for the purchase of the first article of subsistence, enriched the countries they were transmitted to, and thereby promoted their capability of creating manufacturing establishments, so a continuance of the system of importation of corn,

which must be paid for in gold, if the country which produced it should require that it should be paid for in that manner, should as certainly tend to invigorate the further exertions, and extend the future enterprise of those engaged in manufactures, as well as of those engaged in agriculture.

That our non-importation of corn was not necessary to direct a portion of the energies of the population of the Continent to manufactures, is apparent from the state of things in those kingdoms from which we were not accustomed, during the period in question, to receive supplies of corn of any material magnitude. Thus in France, in Germany, and in Russia, the manufactories have been rapidly increased in number, and in importance, and are still daily increasing.

And again, if it is now to be received as a maxim of our national policy, that the export of our manufactured goods is to be upheld and supported by a permanent importation of foreign corn, it must be at least conceded, that the maxim is of modern introduction into our code of political principles. For, as it has been shown, from 1670 to 1765 importation of foreign corn was virtually under prohibition, and never occurred but in seasons of absolute scarcity; and from that time till 1792, when the revolutionary war began, though the quantity of corn imported

not unfrequently exceeded the quantity exported, yet the excess was often small, and in the greater part of this period, as has been seen, the quantity exported has actually exceeded the quantity imported. So that, during the period of the war alone, when unexampled circumstances produced an exception to the general practice and rule, can a precedent be found to justify the conclusion, that it has ever been the policy of this country to import foreign corn for the purpose of promoting the sale of our own manufactures, and counteracting the spirit of manufacturing in other countries. And this precedent, it is contended, is in strictness inapplicable, but if applied at all, would be more properly introduced in refutation than in confirmation of the point assumed by the advocates of free trade in corn.

But let it be supposed, that the object of the advocates of free trade in corn has been granted to its whole extent: that of our annual consumption of twelve millions of quarters of wheat three millions shall be of foreign growth, and that manufactured goods of equivalent value shall be exported in exchange for it. Will competence, content, and comfort, be restored to our manufacturing districts? Will the cheerful habits of industry be again animated by their just reward? It is true, the agricultural population will, by the change of system, encounter

deep distress and degradation ; for the farmer will have been deprived of the means of holding out the reward of industry to their exertions ; but if the manufacturing population receive the benefits thus wrested from the agricultural, it may perhaps be thought, that the aggregate quantity of happiness will remain much the same, and that the nation may disregard the transfer.

The acquisition of misery to the agricultural classes would indeed be certain, but that of happiness to the manufacturing would be still uncertain ; for it might be reasonably apprehended that the spirit of industry amongst the labouring manufacturers would derive only a brief and trivial support and benefit from the accession to the export trade thus created.

In the gloomy picture of distress in our manufacturing districts, recently presented to the attention of the two houses of Parliament by the ministers of the crown, the prevalence of this distress was imputed to the *want of employment* ; while the description of this distress, given by the noble representative of the greatest manufacturing county in Scotland, wanted no other confirmation than was afforded by the prayer of the petitioners, which in its nature distinctly manifested that the source of all their troubles was the want or the deficiency of employment ; the relief they supplicated being comprehended in

the dispensation of aid to effect their meditated purposes and schemes of *emigration*.

We may indeed ask, of what permanent avail to the industry of the manufacturing population would be an augmentation of the export trade to the extent which has been named, great as that imagined extension is supposed to be? For by the use of power-looms and other commanding implements of machinery, a quantity of goods would be fabricated in one year which would suffice to meet the increased demand in two, or perhaps three: and thus demand would be again satiated by a superabundance of supply, and a temporary and short-lived activity be succeeded by a more durable contraction or denial of work.

That a sober conviction of the existence of this state of things is entertained by the manufacturing labourers of Scotland is distinctly shown by their organized plans of emigration, and their suppliant entreaties that the legislature will favour and promote the execution of them; and that a sentiment but little, if at all dissimilar, is entertained by the government of the country, is reasonably to be inferred from the countenance they have afforded, and have expressed a disposition to afford, to the object of the petitioners.

Whilst, however, this country is taking gigantic strides in the measure of supplying the

world with British manufactures ; and this too with a degree of success to which our priority in the use of machinery, the greater perfection of it in this country, our superior capital, and perhaps our greater energy in commercial speculation, may appear to entitle us ; yet it is not to be forgotten, that the progress of improvement and imitation in other countries is not stationary, and that if foreign manufacturers cannot yet, and shall not for some time to come, pass us in the race, they are still imperceptibly gaining upon us, and may shortly render our victory dependent upon struggles beyond the rules of prudence and safety to exert, if not beyond the powers of nature to sustain. For we ought not to conceal from ourselves, that although the day be not yet arrived, it may not be far distant when the political problem will properly undergo discussion by those best able to solve it, whether in the choice of national evils we shall submit to an abandonment of, or at least to a limitation in, the use of certain articles of machinery, or shall consent that large masses of our population shall remain in a state of degradation and of frequent deprivation of all employment.

Although a redundancy of that portion of the population usually occupied in agricultural labour has been experienced during late years in some parts of the kingdom to a great degree,

and is even so experienced in some measure at this time ; yet the excess is not so great but that due encouragement of agriculture by the legislature may absorb it.

With the class of manufacturing labourers the case unfortunately is not the same ; for if all the descriptions of machinery at present in use be continued in unlimited use, even though scientific genius and research shall not extend the range which machinery already occupies in the diminution of manual labour, still no reasonable anticipation of demand for our manufactured goods can possibly keep pace with it.

As then it admits not of doubt that this country is capable of raising its own supplies of food, and that if our agriculture be encouraged and protected, the ordinary price of corn will bear no reference to the importing price appointed by law, but in its advance will be influenced by comparative scarcity, and in its extreme limit of reduction will be controuled by remuneration alone ; it remains only to advert again to that remuneration, and to consider the adequacy of the present laws to ensure that protection, and the changes which may be made in those laws consistently with that protection.

It is said to Mr. Jacob, in the instructions given him, "*it is thought desirable that you should proceed upon a supposition of an average price of wheat at home of from 60s. to 64s.*" It

may therefore be inferred, that it was an impression upon the minds of those who gave these instructions, that 60s. to 64s. was a price at which it was reasonable that wheat should stand in the English markets.

There is no rashness in asserting that an average price of 60s. to 64s. in ordinary years would satisfy the British farmer, and ought to do so; and that, though his exertions would be indifferently and inadequately rewarded by a less price than the former of the two, those exertions would probably not be withdrawn or relaxed if the price were something less, provided the enactments of the law, and the steadiness of the government in administering it, should assure to him the certain enjoyment of a somewhat greater price when the abundance of his crop should be less.

To raise then, and to maintain this confidence in the assumed reasonable price of 60s. to 64s.; it is indispensable that the market be untouched by foreign supply till the price has by a few shillings at least exceeded the greater of those sums; it being of course immaterial both to the cultivator and to the consumer, whether such exclusion be effected by positive enactment, or by the equivalent operation of a protecting duty.

The 55 Geo. III. c. 26. (the present Corn Law enacted in 1815,) prohibits the importation of

foreign wheat for home consumption, when the average price shall be below 80s.

The 22d Car. II. c. 13. enacted in 1670, and unrepealed till 1773 (103 years,) admitted, it is true, at *all times*, foreign wheat for home consumption; but the farmer was protected by a duty of 16s. per quarter when the price remained under 53s. 4d., and by a duty of 8s. per quarter whilst it was under 80s.; which duties, moreover, were then effectual to produce exclusion of foreign wheat, as is distinctly shown by the table annexed to the Report of the Committee of the House of Commons in 1814, already referred to.

Perhaps then, it may be said by those who will concede that protection is due to the British farmer, but will contend that the protection he at present enjoys ought to be abridged; “let the act of 22 Car. II. be re-enacted, and, as in 1670, let the ports be thrown open at all times with the protection of a duty of 16s. reduced to 8s. when the price shall exceed 53s. 4d.” To such a proposition, however, we would reply, that the charges upon the growth of *foreign* corn have not probably been greatly increased since that time; but is it true, that the charges upon corn of our own growth have not been materially increased either? Has not the land-tax, which, whether it be paid by the tenant or the landlord, is a charge

upon the produce, been since imposed? Has not the interest of the national debt created since that period, and increased by the expenses of the last war to a magnitude which would have appeared totally incredible in former periods, augmented the charges upon almost every article of life, and by direct and indirect taxation operating upon the increased amount of his outgoings, rendered an increased price of his produce indispensable to the indemnity of the grower of corn in this country? Is not the value of that produce charged with rates for the necessary relief of the poor, and with other rates for local objects; which, by comparison with the amount charged upon the produce for similar purposes in 1670, has been tripled, quadrupled, and quintupled? The relative position of the parties is most materially altered. The remunerating price to the British farmer might then be as reasonably taken at 40*s.* as now it can be at 60*s.* and a duty of 16*s.* superadded to the costs of production and transport of foreign wheat might then plainly controul the power of competing with a price of 40*s.*; whereas the same amount of duty, the costs of production and transport remaining nearly the same, cannot possibly in the same manner controul or take away the power of competition, when, as at this time, the assumed price to be competed with is 60*s.*

That the Ministers of the country have a substantial measure of alteration to propose we

have their own express declaration, but the nature of it has been concealed ; nor is it here with any confidence conjectured what the nature of that alteration may be. There is, however, a considerable degree of probability in the surmised proposal of a graduated duty from 1s. to 20s., the least amount commencing at 69s. and advancing to 20s. as the price decreases to 50s. ; prohibition being in force when the price is under 50s., and free trade, without any duty, when the price exceeds 70s.

There is much plausibility in such a scheme, but if it be examined with a view to determine its pretensions to the character of a measure of protection to British agriculture, it will, it is conceived, be found defective and fallacious ; for if wheat be taken at the presumed remunerating price of from 60s. to 64s., the duty will vary only from 6s. to 10s., and it must descend to the price of 54s. before the amount of duty will reach 16s., the duty, which at an average price of 53s. 4d., was not deemed or found to be excessive for protection in 1670 ; when, as has been shown, the power of the British farmer to compete with the foreign, was placed under circumstances very far more advantageous.

Indeed, it seems obvious, that such a scheme would have in its operation a natural and necessary tendency to depress the price of wheat of our home growth to the minimum of remunerating price to the foreign cultivator ; which, in-

deed, is so distant from the remunerating price to the British farmer, that even the duty at its maximum of 20s. would not sufficiently counteract it. Nor ought it to be forgotten, that the wheat imported is generally of the best quality, and that when the price of wheat of the best quality in England should be only 50s., that of average quality would probably not obtain 44s. But if the average price of wheat in England could be maintained at the price of 44s., there is great probability that the foreign wheat could be imported, in years of abundance on the Continent, notwithstanding the duty of 20s. with advantage to the importer: for his competition would not be with 44s., the average price, but with 50s., the price of that of the best quality.

It is, however, not refused to be conceded, that the internal situation of the country has been so far altered since the present Corn Law was passed, that a reduction of the importing price from 80s. to 70s. may properly be allowed. But if the remunerating price be from 60s. to 64s., the benefit of the consumer will be promoted by an extension of the prohibition to a point moderately above the greater of those two sums; say to 70s., for the period would probably be short in a season of actual scarcity, during which the price would be gaining an ascent from 64s. to 70s., whilst the confidence inspired into the farmer by the knowledge that importa-

tion would not take place till the price reached 70s. might be reasonably supposed to give that stimulus to his exertions which would retard its advance in the first instance, and in ordinary years depress the amount below 64s. or even 60s.

The Act of 3 Geo. IV. c. 60, passed in 1822, is made dependent, in the commencement of its operation, upon the arrival of the price of wheat at 80s. ; but the condition might be removed, and the act declared operative from the present time. The duties thereby imposed are 12s., with an increase of 5s. during the first three months, when the price is intermediate between 70s. and 80s. ; and 5s. with an increase of 5s. during the first three months when the price is intermediate between 80s. and 85s. ; but perhaps these provisional and temporary increases might not improperly be dispensed with if the following regulations were adopted :—viz. If upon the advancement of the price to 70s. the *whole* of the wheat in warehouse, or to be imported for home consumption, should not at once be permitted to be thrown upon the market ; and if the limited quantity be not permitted to be thrown upon the market of London alone, but be distributable in the several most important stations of probable demand. Thus, if the average price of wheat should in four (*d*) successive weeks exceed 70s.,

(*d*) The continuance of the advance for *six* weeks, as at present requisite, might perhaps not improperly be reduced to *four*.

let 160,000 quarters be thrown upon the market in the ensuing month, but no more ; and let the quantity be distributable thus : at the port of London 40,000 quarters, and at the six following ports, namely, Liverpool, Bristol, Hull, Newcastle, Leith, and Greenock, 20,000 quarters each ; but if in this first month of importation the average price shall still continue in each of the four weeks above 70*s.*, let the importation for a second month proceed in the same manner, and be so continued as long as the average price in each successive period of four weeks shall exceed 70*s.*

It cannot be denied that the system of averages has incurred the severest reprobation, not only from the avowed enemies of the Corn Laws, but also from some moderate and well-meaning persons, who, in their abhorrence of an abuse, would reject the principle abused, whether salutary or not in its original adoption and general application.

From the earliest periods of our history, the Corn Laws have had relation to the price of *middling* wheat ; and it is obvious that if restriction is to subsist at all, it must be connected with middling or average price, which price must by some means be ascertained before either the restriction can properly be made operative, or its application dispensed with.

But most assuredly, in ordinary cases, abuse

of what is right is not held to justify its abandonment.

As often as new frauds have been devised against the revenue of customs or excise, new laws have been enacted to correct and punish them. The endeavour to raise the price of the public funds by a scheme of deception, and thereby to acquire an unjust profit at the expense of others, was upon a memorable occasion, not very distant, visited by the law with the disgraceful punishment of a misdemeanor. Why then is the speculator in corn to be allowed with impunity to advance the market, by nominal sales at fictitious prices, in order to gratify his cupidity of gain? And this too when it should seem that the same penalties of a misdemeanor would with equal reason attach to *him*; and when by such prosecutions conducted to conviction, the general character of traders in corn for integrity and fair dealing, would be rescued from the imputations cast on it, in consequence of the instances of falsity of returns recorded against a few individuals.(e)

The momentous consequences of the impending crisis can hardly be appreciated with a due estimate of their importance; for on the approaching decision of Parliament, it will depend whether that species of property, which is the

(e) See a paper ordered to be printed by the House of Commons, March 4, 1825.

origin and foundation of all other property ; whether the property of largest amount in the kingdom, and that from which the revenue of the country has always derived its main support, is to be depreciated a fourth, or perhaps even a third ; whether the vast capital invested in the cultivation of land, and in occupations subsisting by their connexions with agriculture, is, to the extent, perhaps, of half its present value, to be annihilated ; and whether the hardy and industrious race of agricultural labourers is, to the amount of a great proportion of their numbers, to be proscribed, and to be consigned to idleness and want.

But yet such are the consequences which must inevitably follow the adoption of a system of free trade in corn, be it either without a duty, or with any duty that shall not effectually protect the British cultivator from competition with the foreign grower, and shall not exclude foreign corn from our home-consumption, except in seasons of dearth or scarcity.

This is not the language of prediction awakened by interest ; it is language dictated by sober reason, and it emanates from facts, and from experience.

It is true that the proprietors of land, the cultivators of land, and the agricultural labourers, are but three classes in the great community of England ; but it is also true, that they have not

forfeited their inheritance of a *right* to the protection of the State; nay, further, important as it is to the State to preserve these classes in a condition of activity and competence, and imperative as is the duty in those who govern, to shield them from the experiments which theorists may desire to make upon their property and their comforts, still the question of the abrogation of the Corn Laws has a yet higher reference than to the interests of individuals, and of classes of individuals; for its concern is with the nation at large.

Cheapness of bread, the legitimate, the rational, the proper object of all benevolent and considerate men, can be alone obtained and preserved to us as a permanent blessing by the produce of our own soil; but that produce will indisputably fail, if from our cultivators be withheld the motive of exertion. Let this motive of exertion be maintained in vigour; let the confidence of the farmer be unimpaired; let it be ascertained to him that his toil, his skill, and his capital expended, shall receive remuneration: and plenty will, in ordinary years, be the result; and when Providence shall afflict the country with dearth, a mitigation of the evil will thus have been provided by ourselves.

“ In behalf of the agriculturist, in behalf of the  
 “ manufacturer, in behalf of the public creditor,  
 “ in behalf of the whole community,” said the

present President of the Board of Trade, in the debate in the House of Commons on the 23d February, 1815, "I recommend the adoption of "the proposition before the House;" *viz.* the Corn Bill of 1815.(f)

With the same sentiments of regard for the public welfare, with the same ardour in the cause of our country's happiness, it now becomes us to pursue the same course ; and though we do not confine our views to the particular object to which the right honourable Gentleman then directed his, namely, the Corn Bill of 1815, yet it is to the maintenance of the PRINCIPLE on which that measure was founded, to which we can alone look for a continuance of the blessings that this country now enjoys.

(f) See Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, v. 29, p. 1041.

THE END.

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